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MAJOR GENERAL JOHN A. WHARTON

CAPTAIN WILLIAM WHARTON GROCE

Major General John A. Wharton was born four miles from Nashville, Tennessee, at the home of his father's sister, Mrs. Betsy Wharton Washington, July 3, 1828. He was the only son of his parents, William H. and Sarah Ann (Groce) Wharton.

The history of his ancestors can be found in Macaulay's *History of England*, and in other books on biography, but I will begin with John Wharton, son of Sir William Wharton and brother of Lord Philip Wharton, who came from England to Culpepper County, Virginia, 1760. His wife was Jane Miller. They had one son, John A. Wharton, born in England, 1740, and he came to America with his father at the age of twenty years and settled in Coresville, Albemarle County, Virginia, near North Garden. He married Rhoda Norris of Hanover County, Virginia, of same family as Richard Norris, a member of the Virginia convention of 1830. They had seven sons, George, William H., John, Austin, Jesse, Samuel L., and Dabney. I have the complete history of all these seven sons, given me by a great granddaughter of the eldest son, George, Mrs. Minnie Wharton Robertson, of Nashville, Tennessee, but since this is a history of General John Wharton of Texas, I will begin with his grandfather, William H., the second of the seven sons, who was born 1768, married Judith Harris of Amherst County, Virginia, and died February, 1816. His wife died February 8, 1816, just one week later. They left five children, all of whom made their home with their uncle Jesse, who became their guardian. Their names were Betsy, Martha, William H.,—born 1802, emigrated to Texas in 1827, died March 14, 1839,—Thomas, Jesse, who was born in 1804, and was drowned at age of fifteen, and John Austin Wharton, born 1806,¹ emigrated to Texas in 1829, and died unmarried in 1838. Betsy, the eldest of these children, had two grandchildren, who married Dr. Goodlet of St. Louis, and Louis Strobel of Texas. Their descendants are

¹These dates are taken from the family Bible of the Whartons in Tennessee.

still living here. I knew them well, for they have visited in my home. William H. Wharton, the third of these five children, was a lawyer of ability. He married Sarah Ann Groce, whom he met in Nashville, where she was attending school. She was an intimate friend of his sister Betsy. December 5, 1827, they were married at "Bernardo," Texas, Republic of Mexico, the home of her father, Jared Ellison Groce.

Jared E. Groce emigrated to Texas from Georgia in 1822,² bringing with him nearly one hundred slaves. He thereby acquired from the Mexican government ten leagues of land. Having had his only daughter with him so short a while since her return from college, he was loath to part with her, and offered to her young husband one-third of his vast possessions and many slaves if he would only remain in Texas. He also argued that Texas needed just such men as Wharton at that time. They remained, and her father gave them all the lands which he possessed in Brazoria County.

Knowing that his daughter had never been accustomed to do without comforts, back in the old home, and wishing to shield her from the many hardships which so many of the early settlers in Texas (then almost a wilderness) were compelled to go through, he wrote to a firm in Mobile, Alabama, for lumber, etc., to build a large and commodious dwelling. This was sent on a schooner from Mobile to the mouth of the Brazos and up the river twelve miles to the place selected for the home. Among the slaves whom he had brought with him were two brick masons and six finished carpenters, for which he had paid several thousand dollars. The surroundings were ideal for this beautiful dwelling. The plantation lay between the Brazos River and Oyster Creek, twelve miles from the Gulf of Mexico. There were originally two leagues of land. On one side of the house the lawn ran down to a beautiful lake, and the whole place was surrounded by large live oak trees. Upon their arrival, they found that an eagle had built her nest in one of these and they called the plantation "Eagle Island." This home had all the comforts of a city, for in those days the

²Groce's application for land in Austin's colony was dated July 26, 1824. How long he had been in Texas at that time is not stated. He had ninety slaves.—Spanish Titles, General Land Office, Volume 1, page 258.
—EDITORS.

city did not have gas, etc. It contained eight or nine rooms, each twenty feet square. Her father furnished it with the handsomest mahogany, velvet carpets, etc. It was while this young couple were in Nashville selecting the furnishings that their son, John Austin Wharton, was born.

When this baby was old enough to take a sea voyage, they returned to Texas, and here amid the scenes of the revolution, patriotism and honor, General John A. Wharton spent his childhood. It was at Eagle Island that many a consultation took place among the noble men who lived and died for Texas. It was here that the weary travelers were always received with hospitality. Here also were the scenes of many joyous occasions when the young people gathered together for merry making. And there is not a survivor of the old Texas band who will not remember with love the woman who braved all the trials of the first "Three Hundred," the liberal lady who for so many years dispensed to all comers true Texas hospitality at "Eagle Island," the noble mother of Major General John A. Wharton. He was but seven years old, when his father, William H. Wharton, was sent with Stephen F. Austin and Branch T. Archer, to the United States to secure help for the colonists, and his uncle, John A. Wharton, was at the time a member of the general council at San Felipe. These were exciting and anxious times for the mother and little son. One of the relics of this stirring period still in the possession of the family is the original copy of Santa Anna's farewell to the Texan army, which John A. Wharton brought home with him after the battle of San Jacinto. When eight years old, he was sent to "Bernardo," the home of his uncle, Leonard Groce, to be under the instruction of Mr. Deans (a very brilliant man from Boston), who had been recommended to my father as a tutor for his eldest son. Mr. Deans afterwards founded a college in Galveston, and John Wharton was under his instruction there, until the age of fifteen, when he was sent to Columbia, South Carolina, where he graduated at the age of twenty years.

His father, William H. Wharton, died at the residence of his brother-in-law, Colonel Leonard Waller Groce, on March 14, 1839—from an accidental wound received in his left hand and breast, when drawing his pistol from the holster, to examine it, on the

eve of leaving with some friends for his residence, "Eagle Island." His remains were sent to "Engle Island" to be buried, accompanied by Colonel Leonard Groce and Dr. Branch T. Archer. The latter is also buried at "Eagle Island," where he died September, 1856.

William H. Wharton was a member of the convention of 1833; and was one of the three commissioners appointed by the consultation to the United States. He was a member of the first senate of the Republic of Texas; and was the first minister to the United States. After his return, he was again elected senator, which position he held until his death in 1839. Wharton County of Texas is named for him. His brother, John A. Wharton, Sr., was distinguished not only as a statesman and a lawyer but as a soldier. He was adjutant general at the battle of San Jacinto, and at his grave President D. G. Burnet said of him, in an oration, "The keenest blade on the field of San Jacinto is broken." He died a bachelor December 17, 1838, while a member of the Texan congress.

To return to the subject of the sketch, General Wharton, while at college in Columbia, read law under William C. Preston, one of the most eminent lawyers of South Carolina. It was in Mr. Preston's home that he met his future wife, Penelope Johnson, the only daughter of Governor Johnson of that state. After her mother's death, she made her home with the Prestons. She was a most beautiful and brilliant girl, and it was not surprising that the two young people, thrown together every day for years, should form an attachment for each other. They were married in 1848, a few days after his graduation; and sailed for Texas, accompanied by his mother, who had gone on to attend the wedding.

Two children were born to them, Sarah Ann, who died while yet a baby, and Kate Ross, who died at Eagle Island August 8, 1872, age eighteen years. With her perished the last descendant of the branch of Whartons that came to Texas in 1827. After his return home John Wharton read law in the office of Jack Harris (his cousin) and E. M. Pease (afterwards governor of Texas). Upon receiving his license to practice, he connected himself with Clint Terry. The firm being Wharton and Terry of Brazoria. He was still a member of this firm in 1861.

When Frank Terry raised his famous cavalry regiment, "Terry's Texas Rangers," Wharton joined it with a company, and when Terry was killed in Kentucky, when his regiment for the first time came under fire, Wharton was elected to fill his place.

After arduous service in the retreat of General Albert Sydney Johnston's army from Kentucky to Corinth, Mississippi, Wharton distinguished himself in the battle of Shiloh, and was severely wounded there.

In Forrest's dashing raid through middle Tennessee Wharton was again wounded, when Murfreesboro was captured in July, 1862, and had not fully recovered when he rejoined his regiment for the invasion of Kentucky under Bragg and Kirby Smith. Just before the battle of Perryville, Wharton's brilliant charge at Bardstown, where with greatly inferior force he defeated by impetuous attack a movement fraught with grave peril to our forces, won him promotion to the rank of brigadier general.

His services before and during the battle of Murfreesboro, and with Wheeler's raid through Tennessee while Rosencranz was at Chattanooga, and, later, in the campaign of Chickamauga, gained him a major general's stars.

He was transferred west of the Mississippi in 1864, to command the cavalry corps in that department, and arriving just after Dick Taylor had routed Banks's army, first at Mansfield and again at Pleasant Hill Wharton handled the cavalry of the army with such skill and energy, in the pursuit of Banks down Red River, as brought him high compliments from General Taylor in general orders to his army.

In an altercation with one of his subordinate officers, Colonel Baylor, Wharton was killed at Houston, Texas, April 6, 1865.

The following is a clipping from a paper printed during the Civil War:

The Jackson Mississippian introduces Polk's order complimenting Col. Wharton for the Bardstown affair, as follows, for which as a friend of the Rangers, and especially of their gallant commander, we thank that paper. He couldn't compliment a more deserving man.

The name of Wharton is identified with the struggle of Texas for her independence. There were none more gallant in the field, nor more wise and eloquent in her councils than those who

bore it. When the Southern States absolved their connection with the Northern members of the late Federal Union, Texas, imbued with the spirit of her Whartons, and her Austins and her Rusks, of other days, united with them, laying her choicest offerings upon the common altar. Among the gallant leaders whom she has given to the war, is the distinguished officer whose name heads this article—the worthy son of a noble sire—a very Chevalier Bayard without fear and without reproach.

Col. Wharton is the commander of the famous Regiment of Texas Rangers, whose exploits have become a part of the history of the Army of the West. Below we publish a copy of the general order in special compliment to this brave and skillful officer, and his heroic band, issued by General Polk. The exploit to which it refers is certainly one of the most brilliant of the war, as the order of Gen. Polk abundantly attests. We learn from a source entitled to the highest credit that the entire force of the Rangers on the occasion was only 250, while that of the enemy actually engaged was four regiments, supported in the rear by a battery of artillery and a large force of infantry. It was a hand to hand conflict, and the gallant Texans, led on by the intrepid Wharton, bore themselves in a manner (to quote the language of Gen. Polk) “worthy of the applause and emulation of their comrades of all arms in the army.”

The author of this sketch being a first cousin of General John A. Wharton, raised with him from childhood, and during the war a member of his staff, is personally qualified to corroborate the truthfulness of the following article published at the time of his death in April, 1865. It reads in part:

Maj. Gen. John A. Wharton,—though not to the manor born, he was in the true sense of the term, a native Texan. The talents of his father and uncle, elicited during the stormiest period of the Republic of Texas, made the name of Wharton a tower of strength throughout the land; and Gen. Wharton, being the only male issue of the line, has most nobly sustained the title. Soon after coming to the bar, he was elected District Attorney of the First Judicial District, and to this day the efficiency and firmness which John A. Wharton brought to the discharge of his official duties, are spoken of with admiration by all who knew him in that capacity. He was a Breckenridge elector for this State, in the Presidential campaign of 1860, and by his powerful oratory contributed largely to the success of his party in Texas. Educated in the South Carolina school of politics, he was an uncompromising States Rights man, and vindicated his

political principles in a series of speeches, that have never been surpassed, and rarely ever equaled, in this State. He was the finest orator that the writer has ever heard. He had made rhetoric and elocution a particular study, and a natural vigor of delivery largely enhanced the effect of his oratory. In energy and power of persuasion, in penetration and power of reasoning, in the adaptation of the parts to the whole, in strong and melodious language, in felicity of expression, he probably surpassed any speaker of his day. This alone can explain his great influence over his contemporaries. The results of the Presidential election of '60 found him an advocate for immediate secession, and he was sent as a delegate from Brazoria (the county of his residence) by the unanimous voice of the people, to represent their views in the convention that framed the ordinance of secession. In this deliberative assembly he was a leading spirit. As early as February, 1861, he volunteered for the Brazos Santiago expedition. The objects of this expedition having been successfully accomplished, he turned his attention to raising troops for the Confederate service, and was made Captain of one of the finest companies in the regiment of the lamented Terry. His military career was a brilliant and successful one, and its details befit the future historian more than they do the circumscribed limits of a newspaper article. Suffice it to say that he illustrated the virtues, heroism and abilities of his ancestors, on more than a hundred battlefields, and rose rapidly, by merited promotion, from the rank of Captain to that of Major General. Without a military education, he bent the energies of his mind to the acquisition of military science, and achieved complete success. It is said of him, by competent judges, that our cause had produced no cavalry officer who was his superior. While he exacted from the men and officers under him the strictest compliance with the requirements of duty, to the soldier he was ever a gentle and compassionate friend.

His was one of those rare characters in which the elements so harmonized that there was a predominance in no especial line, but an excellence in all. It may be said of him, that he was successful in every thing that he undertook. As a lawyer, statesman and soldier, he was equally good. A man of strict temperance, the restraining influence of his moral character was felt wherever he went. No man ever possessed, in a greater degree, the faculty of attaching devoted and affectionate friends to himself than Gen. Wharton; and his proudest epitaph might be embraced in the simple line "that those who knew him best, loved him most."

When General Wharton's mother died, having lost husband, son and grandchildren, she left to me and my children her home,

"Eagle Island," and all of her personal effects, with the request that I send to the State capital the oil portraits of her late husband (Wm. H. Wharton) and his brother, John A. Wharton. Although I regretted parting with them, I complied with her wish, and sent the portraits to Austin in 1878.

I have been requested to state for the benefit of the Confederate Veterans what became of the handsome saddle presented to Major General John A. Wharton by the Texas Rangers. General Wharton had sent me back to Texas in 1862 to raise more recruits, and requested me while there to move his family and slaves from "Eagle Island" up the country near my father's home, "Liendo," for safety. We rented the Shelton Oliver place on the Brazos, near Hempstead and a few miles from father's. It was there that his family was living when General Wharton was shot in Houston, and this is the reason that his remains were carried to the Groce burial grounds to be interred. His saddle, sword, etc., were carried to the Shelton Oliver place, where a few months later the house and all its contents were burned to the ground while the family were away from home.

Although, as stated above, there are no descendants of this noble line of Whartons, who emigrated to Texas in 1827, there are many cousins in Nashville, Tennessee; also cousins in Jackson, Mississippi, descendants of Judge Jesse Wharton. Another cousin is J. Houston Wharton of Conroe, Texas, a descendant of George Wharton, the eldest of the seven sons of John A. and Rhoda Norris Wharton.